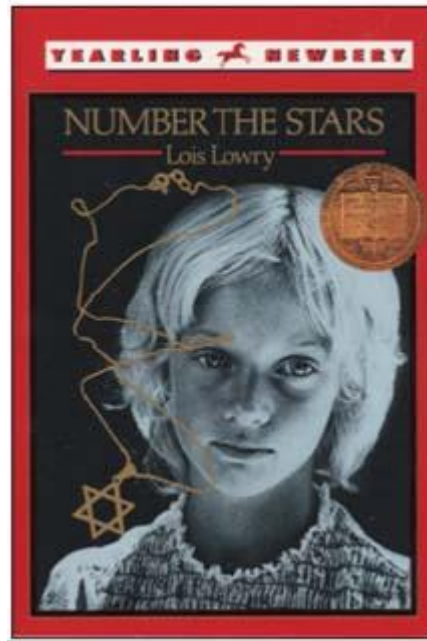


Directions: Copy and paste pages **8 and 9** of this document onto the first page of your google document. Read through each section and write a short summary of each section under the respective headings on your google document. Include only the most important facts, and put them in your own words. The facts should be in the same order as they are in this original article.

Number the Stars The History Behind the Story

Introduction

Lois Lowry, author of "Number the Stars" begins her novel in Denmark in the year 1943. World War II is now into its fourth year and the Nazi military has occupied Denmark for three of them. The Danish Jews are about to be arrested and the Danish Resistance is determined to smuggle their Jewish countrymen to the safety of Sweden. This passage covers the history behind these and other events Lowry mentions in her novel.



The Invasion of Denmark

Lois Lowry gives us only a glimpse of what happened the day the Nazi Armies invaded Denmark and why the Danes did not offer much resistance to the invading forces.

Surrendering as

they did wasn't easy and most Danes had no love of the soldiers that now controlled their country and threatened their freedom.

(1) At the beginning of World War II, the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden

and Norway declared their neutrality. That means they would not take sides in the conflict. With memories of the devastation of World War I still fresh in the memories of many Danes, the governments thought that by being neutral their citizens would be spared the horrors of this new crisis.

(2) Adolf Hitler, now leader of the Nazi Party and ruler of Germany, had no regard for this declaration of neutrality. On April 9th, 1940, his Nazi armies invaded both Denmark and Norway. They did so, Hitler claimed, to protect Scandinavia from Britain and its allies. The real reasons however, were to safeguard a supply of Sweden's iron ore for Germany's war factories via the seaports of Norway and to give Germany use of Denmark's and Norway's ports and airfields. With control of these two countries, Nazi submarines and warships could reach the Atlantic safely via the North Sea and not have to risk using the narrower and heavily protected English Channel. The rich farmland of Denmark would also provide the food needed to keep an army well fed. Only Sweden, which had no shoreline on the Atlantic, was free of Germany's occupying forces.

(3) The government of Denmark was not prepared for the Nazi invasion. It had neither the plans nor the resources necessary to defend itself against the much larger and more powerful German army and air force.

(4) Many of the attacks by the Germans were by surprise. The Danes who did manage to fight back were quickly overwhelmed. The only victory the government could claim was the destruction of its own naval ships several months later. This would keep the ships from being used by the Germans against Danish citizens or anyone else. With their small air force destroyed and under threats of a full scaled attack by Nazi warplanes if they fought back, the government of Denmark decided to surrender to the invaders. In return, Hitler allowed the Danish government to continue to rule and its police to be responsible for day-to-day law and order.



Life Under German Occupation

When the Lowry's novel begins, the German's have already occupied Denmark for three years. Up to that time, the Danes had tolerated the Germans. In 1943, that was about to change.

(5) At first, life under German occupation was not that different from pre-war times. Schools remained opened as did the theatres and parks. Food remained plentiful and the Danes were free to travel the countryside. Their King, Christian X, was allowed to move freely too. He rode daily through the streets of Copenhagen to support his people and to ridicule the occupiers. The Danish Jews were largely left alone, unlike elsewhere in Europe where they were not allowed to keep their jobs, homes and personal

belongings and where they were placed in ghettos and concentration camps. Even the German soldiers liked the relative peace of occupied Denmark.

(6) But, as the war continued, things slowly began to change. With the battles now turning in favour of the Allies, Danish citizens became less tolerant of the German presence in their country. Increased demands for food meant the staples of the Danish diet were being rationed. Curfews were imposed to keep Danish citizens inside at night.

(7) Relations between the Danes and the Nazis worsened greatly when it was learned that the Nazis' were going to arrest Jews and relocate them to other parts of Europe. Unlike other European countries, Denmark guaranteed its Jewish citizens the same rights as all other Danes. To protect their countrymen, who they considered equals, ordinary citizens took matters into their own hands.



The Resistance

*In her novel *Number the Stars*, Lois Lowry tells us about the Danish Resistance through the character of Peter. While Peter did not really exist, he does represent the citizens of Denmark, particularly the young people, who banded together to fight the occupying Nazi forces.*

(8) The Danish resistance or underground was at first quite small. Most of the fighters were teenagers who hated the Germans and what they were doing to Denmark. By 1942, the occupying forces had made life more and more difficult for all Danes and so the number of fighters quickly grew. With the help of weapons drops by Allied air planes, these young men and women secretly organized and successfully carried out acts of sabotage against German vehicles, fuel depots and supply lines. The fighters would appear out of

nowhere, make their attacks and before the Germans could figure out what was happening, disappear under the cover of darkness, hopefully undetected. Some acts were carried out in broad daylight as well.

(9) Resistance to the Germans took many forms. Underground newspapers, banned by the Germans, published accounts of the war. Information on German troop movements and fortifications were passed to the Allies. Even the British "V" for victory campaign was used by the Danes to irritate the occupiers. For the ordinary citizen, the "cold shoulder" towards the soldiers was an effective and safe way of showing disgust.

Image Caption: *Lois Lowry's character of Peter is fictional. He was chosen by Lowry to represent the many young men who fought and those who died as members of the Danish Resistance. In her research for the novel, Lowry found a reference to a resistance fighter named Kim Malthe-Bruun, pictured here. She was struck by his youth and courage. The creation of her character Peter was influenced by this encounter.*



The Arrests Begin

Lowry's novel begins in September when school has reopened for Danish children. The sudden turn of events with the disappearance of Mrs Hirsch and the departure of the Rosen parents marks the beginning of the Lowry's story.

(10) On October 1-2,

1943, the Nazis began arresting Danish Jews. Informed of the plan by a spy inside the German forces, the Danish government alerted the Jewish population. Within days nearly all of them were in hiding in churches and homes along the east shore of Denmark.

(11) Under the cover of darkness, the Jews were moved to fishing boats. With their human cargo hidden in secret compartments under the fish holds, the boats sailed for the fishing grounds. Hours later and after evading German patrols, the boats arrived safely in Sweden. In just three weeks, all but 481 of Denmark's 8000 Jews were smuggled to safety.



Escape

From Gilleleje

Part of Lois Lowry's novel is set at Uncle Henrik's farm in the port town of Gilleleje near the northernmost part of Denmark. It was one of about fourteen ports of departure for the Jews.

(12) About one-fifth of the Jews that escaped Denmark left from Gilleleje. Many Jews knew the small town well. They travelled there for summer holidays. But, in such a small town, keeping things secret was difficult. On October 5, 1943, a local Nazi spy learned of a smuggling plan and informed the Germans. The local church and its parish hall were surrounded. The 80 Jews hidden there were arrested. They became part of the 481 Jews that did not make it Sweden.

Image Caption: *Lois Lowry's describes the smuggling of the Danish Jews from Gilleleje. This was one of many ports used for the smuggling as this map shows.*



Fate of the Arrested Danish Jews

Lois Lowry does not indicate what happened to the Jews who escaped or were arrested. Efforts to protect them continued long after they left Denmark.

(13) The arrested Danish Jews, mainly the elderly and those whose attempts to escape had been discovered, were sent to a ghetto (a rundown and enclosed area of a city) in Terezin, Czechoslovakia. Even then the efforts of the Danish

people to protect their Jewish countrymen did not end. Through the Red Cross, Danes were able to send food and clothing.

(14) In 1944 a group of Danish Red Cross workers were able to visit and check out the living conditions at Terezin. The ghetto, like all the others across Europe, was overcrowded with sick and malnourished prisoners. To hide the truth about these camps and impress the world of its treatment of the Jews, the Germans ordered it cleaned and renovated. Streets were cleaned, buildings painted and schools opened. The Germans also hid some of prisoners from view, deported others to death camps and threatened the remainder with deportation too if they did not behave. The report of the Red Cross members, who were unaware of what the Germans had really done, was a good one. Because of their cooperation, the Germans decided not to deport the Danish Jews to the death camps as planned. The interest the Danes showed in their countrymen's well being saved many lives. Of the 450 Jews arrested in Denmark and sent to Czechoslovakia, 400 survived. Those that did not survive died mainly of disease.

(15) Still, the Danes did not give up. On April 15, 1945, with the help of Norway and Sweden, the survivors in the Terezin ghetto were released into the care of the Swedish Red Cross. Eventually, the Jews were transported to Sweden where they stayed until the end of the war.

Fate of Captured Resistance Fighters

The fate of arrested resistance fighters is also covered in the Afterword of Lowry's novel. Peter represents the fate of too many Danish youth. The treatment of those arrested was similar in other countries of Nazi occupied Europe.



(16) The Nazi armies of Germany were brutal to all who opposed them. Resistance fighters arrested were often tortured for information that could lead the Germans to uncovering the resistance movement, their members and their plans. Some captured were shot immediately while others were executed in public squares; the general population forced to watch as

punishment and as a lesson for any support given them. Many arrested youths simply disappeared, their whereabouts never to be discovered. Some fighters were shipped to concentration camps where they suffered the same fate as the Jews they were trying to rescue. Some resistance fighters whose identities had been discovered were able to flee Denmark, many of them by the same routes used to help the Jews to safety.

Image Caption: In this photo, resistance fighters are arrested by the Nazis. Their fate was often torture and death.

Denmark's Distinction

(17) Denmark has the distinction of being the only country of Europe to save most of its Jewish citizens from the occupying forces of Germany. Of the approximately 7000 Jews living in Denmark at the beginning of the war, all but about 481 were smuggled safely to Sweden.

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For Questions and Comments, contact
[Jim Cornish](#),
Grade Five Teacher,
Gander, Newfoundland, Canada.

This page was created on October 22, 2002.
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visit to my theme pages!

This page was written to explain the history behind the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis during the second world war. It is part of our study of the novel Number the Stars by Lois Lowry. For a complete list of the resources I have created for this novel, click on the link that below.

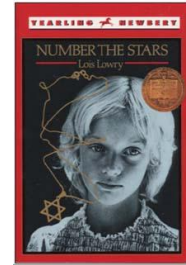
[Number the Stars and A Study of the History Within the Novel](#)

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